

# State and Local

## Researcher: fear of AIDS worse than disease

By Amy Couvillon  
Staff Writer

The fear of AIDS in American society can cause as many problems as AIDS itself, a research scientist said Wednesday.

Dr. Susan McCombie, an anthropologist with the Health Department in Arizona, spoke at a program sponsored by the Texas A&M anthropology department. She said that knowing the public's perceptions is important in the control of infectious diseases.

"AIDS is a frightening epidemic," she said, "not only because of the disease itself, but because of what the fear of AIDS can do."

Americans tend to harbor myths about infectious diseases, McCombie said, such as believing a disease always comes from "somewhere else."

"There is often a tendency in Western culture," she said, "to blame disease on some outside group that is defined by race, ethnicity, nationality or religion."

"For example, in the 15th century, syphilis was called the 'French disease' by the Italians, Germans and English, the 'Italian disease' by the French, the 'Portuguese disease' by the Japanese and the 'German disease' by the Polish."

People historically have had a tendency to attach stigmas to disease



Photo by M.E. Kersten

Dr. Susan McCombie, an anthropology professor from the University of Arizona, answers a question after her presentation on AIDS.

and to the individuals who have the disease, she said, and irrational fear and incorrect information can make the problem worse.

"During the Black Death epide-

mic in the middle ages, people often panicked, and their emotions clouded their judgment," McCombie said. "Many steps taken to stop the disease did more to spread it."

"For instance, at one point, people thought that dogs and cats were spreading the disease. They began to kill off the animals, which turned out to be the natural enemies of the rats that were actually spreading it."

Some of the responses to AIDS in the last five years also have been counter-productive, McCombie said, and have done nothing to stop the disease's spread. She said an example of such an error is the unrealistic belief that "nice people" don't get sexually transmitted diseases.

"If you try and convince people to take precautions like using condoms," she said, "they say things like, 'I don't have to worry about that, I only have sex with clean people.' But once you're infected with it, cleanliness has little to do with it."

McCombie said the public tends to view a disease as more contagious than it actually is.

"Some people have become paranoid," she said. "I've gotten calls at the Health Center from people asking whether it's OK to wash their clothes in a public laundromat, because someone with AIDS might have washed there before."

McCombie said the mass media sometimes sensationalizes AIDS.

"I often get phone calls from the press," she said, "looking for some new figure with which to frighten people."

This kind of coverage can fuel the public's irrational fears that AIDS is a mysterious "super-virus" about which little is known. This image is incorrect, McCombie said.

"With AIDS, we have identified the retrovirus that causes it, and we know how it's transmitted," she said. "Isolation and quarantining of sick individuals only give people a false sense of security that the human environment is disease-free. Every one of us carries a virus that could make someone else sick."

Fear of AIDS, she said, involves more than the fear of dying. People say they would rather be infected with rabies than with AIDS, she said.

"A rabies infection will cause death within 10 days," she said. "But if you're infected with the AIDS virus, you won't get sick for two years or longer — maybe never."

"There are other examples of where our cultural response to a disease was disproportionate to the actual mortality," McCombie said.

"Take head lice and measles, for example," she said. "Measles can cause pneumonia or even death. At the very least, you'll be very, very sick for a week. No one ever died from head lice, and the worst thing you'll get is a little itching. But, incredibly, people would rather have measles than head lice."

## In Advance

### Sorority to sponsor 12th Playday

By Melanie Perkins  
Staff Writer

In a continuing effort to raise money for charity, have fun, and provide physical competition for fraternities, Alpha Delta Pi, a sorority, is sponsoring its 12th annual Playday Feb. 16-21.

Playday is a week-long event in which fraternities try to show their spirit and athletic abilities. Twenty of the 21 Interfraternity Council-recognized fraternities will participate, says Gina Cucci, Alpha Delta Pi Playday chairman.

Although the spirit competition and volleyball tournament continue throughout the week, the main activities will be Friday and Saturday.

The volleyball semi-finals and finals will be at 2 p.m. Friday at Lincoln Center, 1000 Eleanor St., in College Station. Fraternities will participate in a scavenger hunt — scouring the Bryan-College Station area for items such as live goldfish and kazoos — as part of the spirit competition Friday night.

The games will begin at 11 a.m. Saturday at Bryan Utilities Lake Park, and will include a relay race, an apple-bobbing relay and a tug-of-war.

After the games, the Red Bandana restaurant will provide beef and chicken fajitas (all-you-can-eat for \$6).

Tickets for the fajita dinner are available from Alpha Delta Pi members.

The Music Doctors will perform and winners will be announced during dinner.

It's all in the spirit of fun, Cucci says, and the money raised goes to the Ronald McDonald Houses for families of critically ill children.

The sorority expects to raise \$1,500 through the sale of sweat-shirts and fajitas, she says.

## Big challenge for new skydivers is getting out of plane

By Tracy Staton  
Reporter

As the plane taxied away from its berth, the passengers solemnly waved goodbye. The first-time skydivers watched the ground anxiously as the cramped plane lifted roughly off the grass runway. In the eerie quiet, the beginners seemed to wonder when they would reach the correct altitude and if their parachutes would open.

Finally, the jumpmaster unlatched the door of the plane. The first jumper swung his feet outside, knowing that his body soon would follow.

The fear these skydiving students experienced is common, said Steve Haskett, owner of the "drop zone" and skydiving school at Coulter Field in Bryan. Haskett added that

first-time jumpers usually worry that their parachute will not open.

"The challenge to the student on the first jump is just getting out of the plane," he said.

Meeting the challenge is an experience that defies description, he said. In addition, Haskett requires each student to describe his three-minute trip through the atmosphere in a "jump story." These stories are told at the end of each day after every person has made a jump.

"The only difference between a jump story and a fairy tale," Haskett said, "is that fairy tales begin with 'once upon a time' and jump stories start out with 'No s--- there I was, thought I was going to die.'"

Students who took the first-jump course at "Aggies over Texas" Saturday had to wait al-

most all day to hear only three jump stories. Weather conditions were bad for skydiving — winds were 15-20 mph and the cloud ceiling was only at 2,000 feet for most of the day. The ceiling must be at least 3,000 feet for students to jump, and the maximum allowable wind speed is 12-15 mph.

When the ceiling had risen to its minimum level, three students were fitted with gear. Mike Nahas, Mike Sullivan and Karl Pallmeyer donned goggles, helmets and parachute harnesses, and then climbed into the plane. Haskett was their jumpmaster, a licensed skydiver who directs the students.

Although Sullivan and Pallmeyer landed way off target in a wooded area across the highway from the airport, all three students returned to the hangar safely. The other stu-

dents, who weren't able to jump because of the weather, and their instructors gathered around to hear about the jump experiences.

Nahas, a junior modern language major, landed right beside the hangar, only a few feet in front of the plane. He had jumped before, but had used a different type of parachute.

"The time I jumped before, I used military equipment," Nahas said. "This square parachute was a lot different."

Haskett said skydiving as a sport grew out of the military. But as the sport grew, skydivers wanted lighter and more maneuverable gear. Now the jumping is completely different.

When Haskett first started jumping about

See Skydive, page 11

STUDENT GOVERNMENT TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY

# We're Working For You!

## Executive Branch Update

### COSGA

- \* Chairman: Lorrie Brown
- \* COSGA is Feb. 21-24.
- \* This is the first year that delegates from other countries are attending. The delegates are from England and Canada.
- \* Keynote Speakers are:  
Dan Clark - Professional speaker  
Denis Fruit - VP Student Affairs, Univ. of South Carolina

### Big Event

- \* Chairman: Charla Carter
- \* Big Event is March 7 from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.
- \* Committee still taking applications from student groups.
- \* Big Event Bash is Feb. 28 at the Grove

### Public Relations

- \* Chairman: Jody Kay Manley
- \* Post notices on student government information boards in MSC, Commons, Library, Zachery and Academic Building.
- \* Providing student senate updates for information boards.
- \* Finished student government brochure.

### Traditions

- \* Chairman: Louis Meneghetti
- \* Repairing the eternal flame at the entrance to Kyle Field.
- \* Repairing and cleaning the plagues on the 54 Oak trees that honor aggies who died in WWI.
- \* Getting A&M commercials ready for the air.
- \* Promoting a 'New' Aggie Tradition; "Mardi Gras."
- \* Will present Traditions programs for COSGA and Parents Weekend
- \* Working against the Senior Finals proposal which would destroy some important Aggie Traditions.

### Student Services

- \* Chairman: Jose Castro
- \* Studying an insurance policy for Graduate students.
- \* Updating weight room
- \* Trying to provide more parking space by Duncan.
- \* Looking into early grades requests.
- \* Improve ticket distribution.

### Blood Drive

- \* Chairman: Margie Boswell
- \* The Wadley Blood Drive is March 2-5.
- \* Locations are at the Pavillion, Commons, SBISA, and MSC.

### United Way

- \* Chairman: Zane Russell
- \* Committee organizing a football game between the Corps of Cadets and the Kappa Alpha fraternity at Kyle Field. The Corps will be playing for the United Way and Kappa Alpha will play for MDA. It will be a full contact game.
- \* Committee is also sponsoring the Corps Elephant Bowl football game at 1 p.m. on Saturday, April 11. This game will feature the Air Force and Aggie Band vs. the Army and Regiment. All proceeds will benefit the United Way.

### Parents' Weekend

- \* Chairman: Renee Dix
- \* Parents' Weekend is April 10-12.
- \* Organizations need to turn in request forms for master schedule by Feb. 27.

### Muster

- \* Chairman: Wendy Wayne
- \* Muster is April 21.
- \* Committee has chosen speaker for campus Muster.

\* This ad is sponsored by the Public Relations Committee \*